DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 286 FL 022 067

AUTHOR Shukor, Haji; And Others
TITLE Towards ESP Programmes in Technical and Vocational Institutions in Malaysia.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; *Educational Change; *English (Second Language); *English for Special Purposes; Foreign Countries; Government Role; Postsecondary Education; Public Policy; Secondary Education; Second Language Programs; *Technical Education; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the nature of vocational, technical, and polytechnic education in Malaysia, the extent to which English for special purposes (ESP) programs are incorporated into such education, and the need for ESP program reform. In 1992, Malaysia possessed 70 vocational and 9 technical secondary schools, all of which offered some form of ESP instruction in their curriculum. Until recently, ESP instruction was considered a relatively unimportant part of the curriculum. Rapid industrialization and development have created the need for improvement of the English language skills of technical workers, necessitating a reform of the ESP curriculum in vocational and technical schools. Similar needs are also evident at the polytechnic level. Proposed curriculum changes, educational strategies, teacher education issues, governmental policies, and future prospects are examined. (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Hj. Shukor Hj. Md. Dom
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TOWARDS ESP PROGRAMMES IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA

by

Tuan Haji Shukor Haji Md. Dom, Susila Devi,
Tan Sui Chee & Nomita Balasingham

ED 369 286

In Malaysia at present there is increasing awareness of the need to give an ESP approach in technical and vocational institutions so that the language comes across as a relevant and useful resource for communication, skills development and lifelong learning.

In this paper my colleagues and I will present a brief account of Vocational and Technical Education in Malaysia and the ESP programmes in the Vocational schools, the Polytechnics and the Technical Teachers Training College.

The main objective of vocational education is to equip students with basic vocational and technical knowledge and skills. Vocational schools also offer practical training in individual trade skills.

In 1992 there were 70 Vocational and 9 technical secondary schools catering for 27,073 vocational and 5,434 technical students respectively.

To qualify for entry into the vocational schools the students have to pass the Lower Certificate of Education (SRP) which is conducted at the end of the 9th year of school. The students in the Vocational stream follow a two-year trade course which qualified them to sit for the Malaysian Certificates of Education (Vocational) Examination (SPMV), a public examination that enables them to enter tertiary education. The English Language programme for vocational stream is the same as for students in other schools. It is essentially a general English course.

Students whose LCE results do not qualify them to gain entry into the trade course follow a skills course for two years. Here the emphasis is on the acquisition of a skill rather than academic excellence.

There are twenty courses offered, among which are courses that prepare the students to qualify as Domestic and Industrial Electricians, Gas Welders, Arc Welders, Automative Electricians, Radio and Television Technicians and Motor Mechanics. These students only study three academic subjects, mainly Bahasa Melayu, which is the National Language, English and the Islamic Religious Studies or Moral Education. The study of the academic subjects constitutes 20% of their total study time in school.

FL022067

These students follow an ESP syllabus during their English Language lessons. The remaining 80% of their time is spent in the workshop preparing themselves for the Malaysian Skills Certificate Examination conducted by the Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia. Upon completion of the course these students will join the workforce as skilled or semi-skilled workers.

Students who obtain the SPMV Certificate of the SPM can qualify for entry into one of the 6 Polytechnics in Malaysia. They must have a pass in Maths. It is not necessary to have a pass in English for Engineering and Commerce Courses at the Certificate Level. However, a pass in English is required for engineering courses at the Diploma level and a credit in English is compulsory for the Diploma in Secretarial Science Course.

Of the 6 Polytechnics in Malaysia only two of them namely the Ungku Omar Polytechnic (PWO in 1969) and athe Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Polytechnic (PSAS) in 1977 are considered established while the other four are relatively new.

The Polytechnics run two main types of courses:

a) A two-year certificate level course which could lead to a diploma in the third year. Not all students end up in the diploma programme. In the certificate course the students do their industrial training for six months in the third semester.

b) Some of the diploma courses are as follows:

   i) Diploma in Secretarial Science - a two-year course with practical training in the third semester.

   ii) Diploma in Accountancy and Electromechnical Engineering. This is a three-year course which requires students to undergo industrial training in the fifth semester.

   iii) Diploma in Marine Engineering. This is a four-year course which requires the students to undergo their industrial training (on land) in the third semester and another industrial training (at sea) in the fifth and sixth semester.

Mr. Tan Sui Chee will give details of the various ESP programmes in the polytechnics.

The third section of the paper will deal with the Technical Teachers Training College and Mrs. Nomita Balasingham, the head of English at that college will present the details of the various English language programmes.

But first of all, let me call upon Miss Susila Devi to tell you more about our Vocational Schools System.

ESP IN SECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

The Vocational Secondary Schools are divided broadly into two streams, that is, the vocational stream and the skills stream.

For the purpose of this paper, the 'Vocational Secondary Schools' refers specifically to the skills stream in the Vocational school, and the English Language programme refers to the ESP programme currently being used for the students of the skills stream.

WHY THE NEED FOR A CHANGE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMME FOR THE SKILLS STREAM STUDENTS

An Overview of the English Language Programme Prior to 1992

The English Language Programme prior to 1992 was designed as a follow-up to what the students had done before their entry into the skills stream. This programme was an adapted and simplified version of the Communicational Syllabus used by the academic schools then. The English Language was of low priority because it appeared to have no immediate relevance and neither did it appear to have any potential use for the students of the skills stream.

THE MOVE TOWARDS A CHANGE

In 1991, attempts were made by the Technical and Vocational Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia to review the English Language programme for the skills stream students in the Vocational secondary schools with a view to formulating a more suitable English Language programme. The Ministry felt that these students needed a language programme that would cater to the proficiency and needs of the students in the skills stream. This move was made to prepare these students to face their prospective work environment.

In addition, there was the realization that future employers of these students expect these students to have some basic English for purposes of communication. It was felt, that these students would eventually need English for personal achievement as reading materials are largely in English for many of the trade courses.

These students would need English if they were to be sent to an English speaking country for further or advance courses related to their trades. Above all, if these students had to interact with foreign contacts locally, they would certainly need to use English.

All of these reasons coupled with the national aspiration of gearing the country towards becoming a developed nation by the year 2020, motivated the authorities to develop a more pragmatic syllabus for the students in the skills stream. Hence the birth of the ESP syllabus in February 1992.

This paper will from this point on highlight the ESP programme in the Vocational Secondary Schools.

THE ESP PROGRAMME

The ESP programme in the Vocational Secondary schools is specifically for the skills stream students. The students enter the course when they are 16 years old. For most of them, their English proficiency level is comparable to that stipulated in Band 3 in the English-Speaking Unions Nine-Level Scale. This means that the students can use a limited range of the English language, sufficient for simple practical needs. This syllabus has been designed to build on to the general English course the students have learnt prior to their entry into the Vocational Schools.

The ESP course covers 11 topics with emphasis on the oracy skills in English necessary for the students to communicate and function effectively in their job situation. The syllabus also provides for the acquisition of study skills and job-hunting skills. The ESP teachers are given a resource book on ESP teaching and learning materials which were compiled during and ESP workshop in February 1992. The resource book provides guidelines and ideas for the teachers. The teachers are encouraged to adapt the materials and add on to the resource.

Evaluation is an on-going process. The students are assessed based on agreed-upon-preset criteria, that is, the students decide on the level and kind of assessment that they want to do. Marks awarded for written assignments are recorded. Listening skills and oral presentations are evaluated too. However, at the end of the semester a standardized school-based final examination is set. There is no formal public examination for this course.

ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

Pedagogical problems faced by the ESP teachers are wide and varied, but positive thinking and collaboration among the ESP teachers and the cooperation of the trade teachers have helped to alleviate the problems to a certain extent. These problems are viewed as challenges. This paper now sets out to discuss some of the challenges and the various strategies used to improve the teaching of ESP.

MATERIALS

The ESP syllabus is a pragmatic syllabus where the learners determine a fair amount of what they want to learn. Hence the ESP teachers are kept busy constantly selecting and developing materials suitable for use in class. The ESP teachers in the schools pool their resources and expertise to ensure that the resource centre is sufficiently equipped and the materials periodically reviewed. Files are opened for the various topics and in them are kept all the relevant articles, newspaper cuttings and visual stimuli. All these materials are kept in a common place for use by all the teachers.

TEACHERS

Majority of the English Language teachers in the Vocational schools are trained as ESL teachers. It is not unusual for these teachers to be required to teach ESP to the students in the skills stream and at the same time to teach basic English to the students in the vocational stream. This challenge hence poses some pedagogical confusion. To overcome this challenge English Language panel meetings, at school level, are held at least once a month. The proceedings of such meetings are minuted and action plans are maped out. The action plans are reviewed perodically with a view to improving the performance of the students. In a number of vocational schools, the time-table for English is so arranged that time has been alloted for all the English teachers to meet once a week for professional discussions.

All English language teachers have been provided with lists of suggested strategies and activities that could be employed to stimulate the students in their learning process. Most of these suggested activities provide for active student participation.

The concept of networking has been a great asset. All the vocational schools in the country are divided into zones. Periodically the ESP teachers meet to discuss matters pertaining to the teaching and learning of English.

ESP courses have been conducted and will be conducted to train ESL teachers to teach ESP.

Technical teachers are engaged to assist the ESP teachers when it comes to the content area of the ESP lessons. The technical teachers help to determine the kinds of manuals and instructions that would be necessary and helpful for their students. This helps to syncronize what is going on in the English language lesson with what is going on during the practical training sessions. A number of ESP teachers have discovered that discussions with technical teachers have helped to increase their repertoire of technical words.

LEARNERS

To the students English represents a low priority subject because as mentioned earlier the students see no immediate use of the language, as most of them would be joining the job-market as skilled or semi-skilled workers.

To motivate the students to learn English and be aware of its usefulness, ex-students who have joined the job-market are invited to speak to the students in schools. This first hand information from people who are almost their peers provides the impetus towards more positive reception of the ESP lessons.

Another strategy that helps to motivate the students is industrial visits. During the visits, the students are made aware the need to use English in their work environment.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The rapid economic development of the country has brought an increasing demand for well-trained skilled workers, technicians and engineers in all fields. Given that this nation is fast moving towards industralization and the use of high technology, it is inevitable that communication would be of utmost importance in all business and technological enterprises. ESP, hence, ESP is seen as one of the contributing factors towards the realization of the nation's goal.

ESP IN MALAYSIAN POLYTECHNICS

BACKGROUND

English For Specific Purposes is relatively new in Malaysian Polytechnics. A series of ESP courses on syllabus design were conducted for polytechnic English lecturers in 1991. The first draft of the new ESP syllabuses was produced in early 1992. A pilot study on the new syllabuses was conducted after that. Modifications were made to the draft syllabuses based on the feedback obtained through the pilot study. The final draft was feedback obtained through the pilot study. The final draft was distributed to the polytechnics to be implemented in the first semester of the 1992/93 session.

Prior to the implementation of the current ESP programmes, the Ungku Omar Polytechnic (PUO) and the Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Polytechnic (POLISAS) were running separate English Language Programmes which focussed on the teaching of grammar as well as improving the general proficiency of the students. The syllabuses then were formulated according to the English lecturers' intuitive perception of the students' need for

English. Industrial visits and the gradual exposure to ESP brought about the awareness amongst the English lecturers of the need to have an English language programme tailored to the needs of the students as well as the expectations of the students' prospective employers. This, together with the need to have a formalised and standardised English language programme for all polytechnics, was the main reason for the revamping of the old syallabuses.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

In order to formulate an ESP syllabus which caters for the students, needs analyses were conducted by the English lecturers at various polytechnics in the following three main areas:

a) the proficiency levels of the students

b) the present academic needs of the student

c) the language skills required for performing tasks at the workplace.

The aims of the needs analyses were :

a) to ascertain the students' proficiency level

b) to find out the needs for English in the students' respective fields of specialisation

c) to find out the language skills required for performing tasks in the workplace.

THE PROCEDURE

a) a proficiency test was given to randomly selected students of the various courses.

b) interviews and questionnaire surveys were conducted with the following groups:

i) students
ii) alumni
iii) subject lecturers
iv) students' prospective employers

The findings of the needs analyses showed that -

a) about 60% of the students had low proficiency level in English. Their English proficiency level is comparable to that stipulated in Band 4 in the English-Speaking Unions Nine-Level Scales.

b) the Commerce students needed more English than technical students.

c) the subject lecturers listed teaching for understanding as the most important skill that the students should have.

d) the employers' expectations of their prospective employees' proficiency level varied according to the type of industry. Multi-national companies placed more emphasis on English compared to local companies. However, most of them felt that there would be a need for a reasonable level of proficiency in English for career advancement.

THE ESP PROGRAMMES

From the findings of the needs analyses, the following English Language programmes were formulated:

1) English for Technical Purposes - for all Engineering courses.

2) English for Commercial Purposes - for all Commerce courses.

3) English for Secretarial Science - for all Secretarial Science Students.

Below are some of the areas of the above ESP syllabuses:

1. STUDY SKILLS :

   a) Dictionary Skills
   b) Library Skills
   c) Reading Skills - Skimming, Scanning etc.
   d) Research Skills
   e) Note-taking

2. Oral Communication Skills :

   a) Conversational English
   b) Telephone Skills
   c) Oral Presentation

3. Information Gathering Skills :

   a) Extracting useful information from reference materials.
   b) Transforming from linear to non-linear form.
   c) Writing simple reports based on the information gathered.

4. Instructions :

   a) Giving, receiving and carrying out both oral and written instructions in job situations.

5. Descriptions and Comparisons of Objects and Processes :

   a) Describing differenct objects and processes
   b) Stating advantages and disadvantages for different purposes.

6. Form Filling :

   a) Filling various job related forms.

7. Job Seeking Skills :

   a) Interpreting job advertisements.
   b) Writing an application letter and a resume.
   c) Preparing for a job interview.

8. Meetings :

   a) Participating at a meeting
   b) Preparing and writing documents related to meeting.

9. Translation :

   a) Translating Business and Commercial documents from the National Language to English.

10. Business Correspondence :

    a) Writing business letters for a variety of purposes.

Some of the above areas are common to all the syllabuses. Generally the Commerce and the Secretarial Science Syllabuses cover the areas in greater detail because the students have more contact hours as well as a more pressing need for English.

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

There is continuous assessment throughout the semester. It consists of short tests, written assignments and oral presentations. Students are required to do extra assignments if they do not meet the minimum standard set.

PROBLEMS, STRATEGIES AND PROSPECTS

VALIDITY OF THE NEEDS ANALYSIS

In the Malaysian context, it is hoped that the needs analysis were conducted at the right time. The economic situation and the demand and supply of labour could have influenced the needs for English in the workplace. Employers in a tight labour market, typical in the booming Malaysian economy between 1989-1992, tend to place less concern over the English proficiency level of their potential employees. The reverse of the situation may occur in a less vibrant economy. Employers would then raise their expectations and the ability to communicate in English could become a deciding factor for securing employment.

This factor could have affected the findings of the needs analyses which were conducted.

SYLLABUS DESIGN

The needs for English vary according to the fields of specialisation of the students and the nature of work that they would eventually be involved in. For example, an electrical engineering graduate who becomes a sales engineer may need more oral communication skills than one who works as a technician in a factory. This poses a problem in devising a programme flexible enough to fulfil the students' diversified needs.

In preparing the English language syllabuses, there was also the difficulty of striking a balance among the following categories of needs for learning English:

a) the immediate academic need
b) the post graduation needs - for performing tasks in the workplace, and
c) the professional development needs - for career advancement.

MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

Students are generally aware of the importance of English, but it is still a low priority subject to them because the need for English is not pressing for academic purposes as well as for securing employment after graduation. This is because the medium of instruction is in the national language and they do not have to use english outside the classroom. In addition, most of the students are employed even before they graduate. There is such an acute shortage of technical personnel that employers are prepared to overlook the English proficiency level and opt for their technical knowledge.

On the other hand, the need for English becomes crucial when they are poised for career advancement or for professional development. This is especially true in multi-national companies where the language of work at the management and executive level is English and training programmes could be conducted overseas.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

At the moment there are no specific text books in use. Instructional materials are adopted and adapted from various sources. Authentic materials are also being solicited from the workplace. As the syllabus is new, it is difficult to gauge the suitability and effectiveness of the materials that are selected for the students.

LACK OF TRAINED ESP TEACHERS

As ESP is relatively new in Malaysia, the number of trained and qualified teachers in this area is not adequate. The English teachers have a background in General English, and therefore it is difficult for them to move into ESP without any special training.

STRATEGIES AND PROSPECTS

One of the strategies to meet the many challenges is to include in the syllabus the teaching of Study skills and Information Gathering Skills which would enable the students to work towards their self-development thus paving the way to lifelong education.

The ESP teachers have also found that visits to the workplace, especially those with an English speaking environment, are useful to motivate the students in learning English and to allow them to have a greater awareness of the importance of English. For example, students could be asked to seek permission to actually visit the workplace and interview the people to get information about career opportunities related to their fields of studies or even about the use of English in that workplace. An experience like this will cater for the practice of the various language skills besides exposing them to an authentic work environment.

Another strategy that has been adopted is to have continuous liaison with the workplace through industrial visits and attachment. Polytechnic students are required to undergo industrial training of six months during their course of study. English lecturers can visit them during the period to have a better understanding of the needs of the workplace, as well as the communication problems faced by the students. It is during these visits that English lecturers can solicit authentic materials from the workplace. There should be a column on language needs in the feedback reports from the companies offering training to our students.

An effort is currently being made to pool and compile materials from the different polytechnics. The polytechnics have agreed to collaborate to produce materials which would in turn be disseminated to all other polytechnics. The possibility of having text books based on the syllabuses is also being explored.

Another strategy that would be looked into is the possibility of having industrial attachment for the language staff at a company which is a prospective employer of the students. This could be done during the vacation so that teaching time is not disrupted. the lecturer on attachment would spend time as a staff member cum observer in the different sections of the company. This would be an invaluable exposure for the lecturer to gain first-hand knowledge of the use of English and of the problems of communication in the workplace. Companies having employees with communication problems which may affect their productivity would welcome such an initiative from the polytechnics.

Polytechnic students with low proficiency in English could be sent to companies which use English as the medium for communication during their practical training. They would then be fully exposed to English and be compelled to use it. To ensure that this is carried out successfully, the students should be sent to companies within a reasonable distance from the polytechnic to enable the lecturers to monitor their progress and problems.

Currently a polytechnic is exploring the prospect of Self-Access Language Learning. It has proven to be quite effective in the following ways:

a) to have a variety of self-study ESP materials to cater for the various fields of specialisation.

b) to have materials of different degrees of difficulty to cater for students with different proficiency levels.

c) to instill in the students a habit of doing self-study.

d) to provide additional exposure to English as classroom contact hours are limited.

Self-Access Language Learning is a prospect Malaysian polytechnics will be working towards. A system of compiling and exchanging self-access materials would be established with the Language Unit at the Technical and Vocational Education Division as the coordinating body. Assistance will also be sought from local institutions which have such a facility.

A comprehensive staff-development programme has been drawn up to cater for the professional up-grading and enrichment of the English language lecturers who have little or no formal training in ESP. So far, a number of in-house training programmes have been conducted for the teachers involved in ESP. There is also a joint effort with British Council in conducting courses in ESP and sending teachers to summer schools and for master programmes in the United Kingdom.

A language unit has been set up at the Technical and Vocational Division of the Ministry of Education to coordinate training programmes and to monitor and review the implementation of ESP programmes at the polytechnics. The unit will also act as a centre to coordinate the sharing of ESP teaching materials developed by the polytechnics. Efforts will also be made to liaise with resource centres of the region, in particular, the SEAMEO English for Business and Technology Project.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The Malaysian economy is moving away from labour intensive industries towards high technology industries. The need for English has become more pressing as there will be demands for technical personnel who can be directly involved in the transfer of technology from foreign investors. This is in line with the national aspiration of becoming a developed nation by the year 2020.

The existing ESP programmes should not be looked upon as final. They will be reviewed periodically. There will also be a continuous effort to carry out further needs analyses to keep up with the changing expectations and requirements of the industries.

ESP (BA 110)
080194/rmy